

# The effects of moderate alcohol consumption on older adults: A scoping review

Sophia Pi<sup>1</sup>, David Newcombe<sup>1,2</sup>, Natalie Walker<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Population Health, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland

<sup>2</sup>Centre for Addiction Research, University of Auckland

**Background:** Current evidence on the health effects of moderate alcohol consumption is inconclusive and unclear. Studies have found a J-shaped relationship between alcohol and health where moderate drinking has the lowest risk of disease or mortality, and non-drinking and heavy drinking represent heightened risk. In contrast, other studies have found no effect or increased risk of disease from moderate alcohol consumption.

**Aim and objectives:** Undertake a scoping review on literature investigating the relationship between light to moderate drinking and health in older adults ( $\geq 50$  years) to 1) understand what is known about the effects of moderate alcohol consumption on health outcomes and 2) identify common health outcomes that are researched in relation to moderate alcohol use

**Methods:** This review followed PRISMA-ScR guidelines and used three databases (Scopus, MEDLINE and PsycInfo). The studies from the search were uploaded onto Covidence for title & abstract screening and full-text screening based on the inclusion criteria (Figure 1). Longitudinal cohort studies published after 2011 were eligible for the review. Final studies that fulfilled the eligibility criteria were examined with thematic analysis.

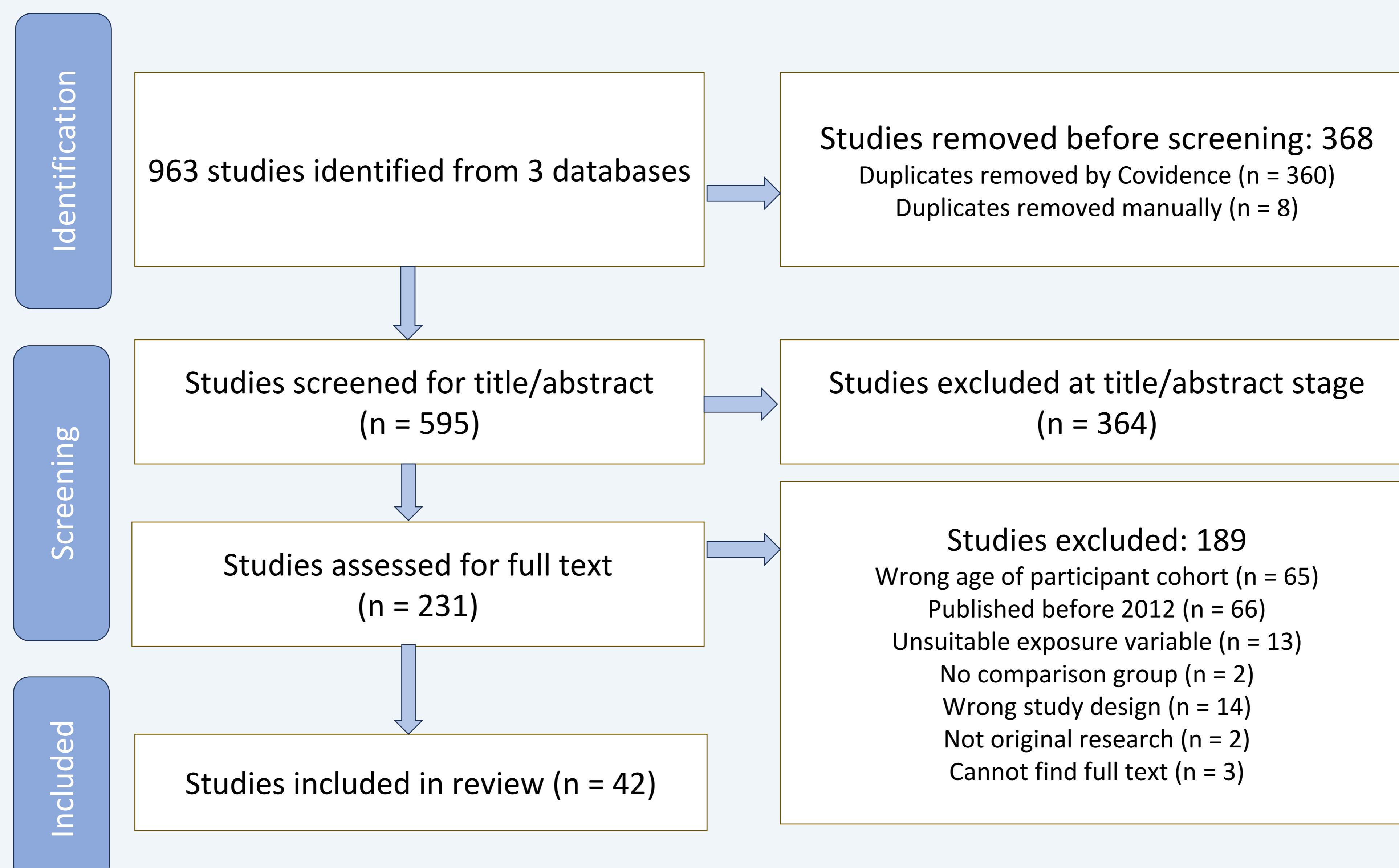


Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart of scoping review

**Results:** A total of 42 papers were included in the scoping review. A broad range of outcomes were measured across studies, which can be categorized into nine different outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1: Results of scoping review based on nine health outcomes

Health outcome	# of studies	Results: what is the effect of moderate drinking on the outcome?
Mortality	16	Contradictory results; protective effect, no effect and increased risk, depending on the type of mortality (e.g. all-cause, cancer-related)
Cognitive function	8	Mixed results; both significant protective effect and no effect on cognitive function
Mental health	5	4 out of 5 studies found protective effect on depression
Composite health score	4	Contradictory; some studies found a protective effect on health-related quality of life whereas others found no effect
Bone health	3	Significant protective effect on fracture risk, bone mineral density and number of falls
Cardiovascular disease	2	No significant effect on the risk of atrial fibrillation (among adults with high cardiovascular disease risk) and heart failure (in adults with hypertension)
Neurological conditions	2	Mixed results; one study found no effect on dementia and the other study found reduced risk on Alzheimer's disease pathology in men
Cancer	1	Linear relationship; any amount of drinking increases risk of cancer (e.g. prostate, breast) compared to non-drinkers
Healthcare utilisation	1	All types of drinking patterns (low-, moderate- and high-risk) have similar rates of healthcare utilization

**Conclusion:** The scoping review highlights the need for more longitudinal research to elucidate the relationship between alcohol and health for different subgroups of the population including older adults.